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Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

Give in, but don't give up

by Clarence Thomson

I knew it. I knew it was right to suspect will power. I've done it since my youth, despite more years of education than were good for me. Schools and their adult equivalent, corporations, are always emphasizing will power. Extrinsic motivation depends on will power: "If you'll do this thing you see no reason to do, we'll give you money." "Sort these papers," "Hit these keys on the computer," "Attend this soporific meeting" — all of these are not so much counter-intuitive (college talk for "stupid") as they are opposed to instant and pleasurable gratification.



Will power doesn't work. Well, according to a delightful experiment it works a little, but is a scarce personal resource. The researchers gave two groups of students a fairly easy task and told one group they could eat the fresh-baked, aromatic chocolate chip cookies or some celery sticks while they did it. The other group was told they could not have any of the cookies, but were welcome to the celery.

Both groups were then given a maze to figure out, but the maze was rigged — it was not possible to solve. Guess what? The group that had permission to eat the cookies worked a lot longer than the other group. Why? Because the celery snackers had used up all their will power resisting the cookies! They didn't stay at a failing task as long as the cookie monsters did.

David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, was of a similar opinion:

Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.

Enneagram coaches and students can use this understanding to high advantage. You are not going to do very many things for very long if you don't want to. If you know your Enneagram style, you have certain energies (*passions* as Hume calls them) you must integrate into your strategies for success.

For example, if you're a Five and you're told you need to network by lunching with different people in the office and getting more involved in the community and passing out your business cards, you may consciously agree that's a good idea. You won't do it. Your coach, your manager, and your self will be upset, because you're not doing what you need and said you wanted to do.

That's because reading books with footnotes is your real passion and you can't wait to be home by yourself, curl up and begin reading.

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Give in, but don't give up (continued)

I've read the coaching books. The three I checked for this article are all in favor of focusing on your goal. Seems like a harmless proposition. But our Enneagram style is a pre-existing condition, a passion, an unconscious dynamic pursuit of a goal that may or may not be congruent with the goal we consciously accept. If I have a Seven style (in my case, in spades), I will agree to pursue my goals actively and creatively with the tacit understanding, hardwired and practiced, that this pursuit will not interfere with my pursuit of pleasure. I will do whatever you ask, as long as I can have fun at it. Now, I'm good at making a startling number of things fun, but if I cannot do that, my goal will suffer.

I had the pleasure of coaching a tall, beautiful blonde this weekend. She reinforced my thesis because she convinced me even horses know it. Yes. She exudes and understands energy. She loves horses. So she takes her clients out to the corral and begins to talk with them. When they start being ultra-reasonable and "in their heads" as she put it, the horses walk away. But when her clients "get real" and start talking about their real, perhaps neglected, passions, their energy shifts. When it does, the horses come over and stand by them, even on occasion putting their noses up against the person as they sense the flow of energy. Even horses know you can't get much done by reason and will power, unless you acknowledge and cultivate your deeper unconscious (Enneagram) passions.

So in the interest of having you do a little more than think about what I've written, do this self-exploration using energy instead of thought. I call it an energy audit.

Divide a piece of paper into three vertical columns. Label the left column "persons," the middle column "places" and the right column "events" or "things."

Then, on the top half of the page, list the people, places and things that seem to energize you and on the bottom half of the page, list what drains your energy. I know, some people do both, but because that's so, list them in both places but pay attention to context (events and places). It's our Enneagram energy that flows from our unconscious constant focus to motivate us. Trying to motivate ourselves to do what we don't want to do is tiring. We can do some of it — will power is real. We can't do much of it — will power is limited. When Shadrach Smith and I wrote our book on weight control, we found that the major diets like Atkins, Pritikin, and South Beach all work. People don't, though.



Joseph Campbell told us to follow our bliss. The research shows us we do precisely that, even when it interferes with what we're told to do and think we have to do. Following our bliss intelligently and consciously means following our inner energy sources and creatively directing them towards what will keep us out of jail and solvent while we do what we damn well please.

Lots of free cookies at our blogs:

Enneagram Coach: <http://enneagramcentralcoach.blogspot.com>

Self-Coaching Tips: <http://outoftheboxcoaching.blogspot.com>

Coach Mentor: <http://mentoringforcoaches.blogspot.com>

Practices in Presence: <http://practicesinpresence.blogspot.com>

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